

for May 12-16-68
11:30 p.m.
Ike
Wolf
Ellsberg

OUTLINE OF VIETNAM OPTIONS PAPER

A. The Current Situation and Near Term Prospects

1. The military situation in South Vietnam.
 - a. Changes in the general situation over the past year.
 - b. Force levels: U.S., VC/NVA, GVN. Changes over time; infiltration from NVN; improvements in VC/NVA weapons; prospects over next several months.
 - c. VC/NVA and US/GVN military tactics and strategy; inadequacies of U.S. strategy (profligate use of resources, attraction of NVA through large unit operations, inadequate attention to RF, PF, police, too big a U.S. establishment).
 - d. Power in the countryside and in urban areas.
 - e. The state of ARVN.
2. The political and economic situation in South Vietnam.
 - a. Performance of the Thieu government.
 - i. Administrative competency
 - ii. Breadth of support
 - iii. Consumption Corruption
 - iv. Stability

- b. Attitude of various factions.
- c. SVN economy
- d. Status and strategy of the NLF.

3. The situation in North Vietnam.

- a. Economic, military, and political.
- b. Its probable view of SVN, U.S., China, and USSR.
- c. Its objectives and alternatives.

4. The USSR and Communist China.

- a. Extent of military and economic aid to NVN.
- b. Attitude towards war and towards U.S.-NVN negotiations.

5. The current cost of the war.

- a. 540,000 in SVN (plus X outside supporting those inside).
- b. U.S. deaths in past three months running at about 8,000 per year; SVN deaths?
- c. \$20 billion + per year.
- d. Recent reductions in air losses and artillery ammo (approximately \$3 billion); however being absorbed in other part of DOD budget.

6. Prospects for the next year.

- a. Unless U.S. takes initiative, probably no major change in situation in VN.
- b. Major uncertainties.
 - i. Hanoi capability and will; willingness to pay price of withdrawal of NVA from SVN in order to get U.S. withdrawal from SVN.
 - ii. VC/NVA combat potential.
 - iii. GVN stability.

B. Broad U.S. Alternatives1. Continuation of present force levels and strategy.

How will it end?

- a. Objective: wear down the VC/NVA, support process of building GVN.
- b. Forecast: no dramatic change, VC/NVA strength will hold up; probable reduction in combat actions and combat losses, but with some VC/NVA "spectaculars"; probable strengthening and broadening of Thieu government but with some change of "anti-war" coup(?).
- c. Continued high U.S. cost in lives and budget.
- d. Need for change in strategy; need for imposition of stricter resource constraint.

2. Early ending of U.S. combat participation.

- a. Objective: getting U.S. out within one to two years(?); continued aid to GVN; buying time for GVN through negotiations with Hanoi for troop withdrawals.
- b. Mutual, agreed withdrawal (with or without cease fire).
- c. Unilateral withdrawal by U.S.

3. Continued but sharply ^{decreasing} reduced U.S. involvement.

- a. Aim at reducing U.S. level by 50% within year; tell DOD to come up with plan; general guidelines on strategy.
- b. Advantages: lowered U.S. cost and visibility; pressure on GVN, pressure on Hanoi.
- c. Disadvantages: continued U.S. cost, VC/NVA resurgence?

C. Key Issues for Decision

- 1. Basic issue: de-Americanization of war; ability of GVN to survive.
- 2. Should U.S. begin troop reduction without agreement from Hanoi for NVA withdrawal?
- 3. Understandings with Hanoi on infiltration and city attacks (issue?). Consequences of a cease fire?
- 4. U.S. political-military strategy in SVN.
- 5. FY 70 budgetary implications?

6. Time table.

7. Actions in other Southeast Asian countries, especially Laos and Thailand.

8. MACV authority?

D. Proposed Actions

1. Reduce U.S. presence now; set goal for DOD of 50% within year; *25% within two years.*

2. U.S. role.

a. Combat support in reserve to counter major VC/NVA attack.

b. Air support.

c. Logistic support to ARVN.

d. Pacification?

e. Economic support.

3. On negotiations, if Hanoi withdraws NVA, U.S. withdraws combat forces (but will leave MAAG and continue economic and military aid). U.S. should press GVN to broaden political composition but not force coalition.

4. Laos and Thailand.

5. Other contingencies?